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ABSTRACT

A study examined the demographics and preliminary skill levels of adults enrolled in programs of adult special education, adult basic education (ABE), and English as a second language (ESL) in Iowa. Data were collected from a representative (but not statistically random) sampling of 495 ABE participants from Iowa's 15 community colleges. The major findings were as follows: (1) the population served was balanced with respect to gender; (2) 65% were below 36 years of age; (3) 80% were enrolled in ABE programs; (4) 77% had fewer than 12 years of education; (5) participants with more than 12 years of education or with college diplomas were enrolled almost exclusively in ESL programs; (6) 12% had fewer than 7 years of education; (7) 84% spoke English, and the remaining 16% spoke Vietnamese, Spanish, Chinese, or other languages; (8) 67% were Caucasian, 14% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 11% Asian or Indo-Chinese; (9) 43% of the special education students can recognize certain words and phrases; (10) ESL programs are serving three main ethnic groups (Indo-Chinese, Asians, and Hispanics); and (11) nearly half of the ABE learners can read at a high school entry level but have significantly lower math skill levels. (Appended are a test score interpretation table and guidelines for interpreting tables included in the document.) (MN)

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A Survey of Learner Demographics and Preliminary Skill Levels

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CASAS, September 1993

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Iowa's Adult Basic Education Programs:

A Survey of Learner Demographics and Preliminary Skill Levels

Preface

This report was prepared for the Iowa Department of Education by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The report provides baseline information about three target adult populations enrolled in adult basic education programs in Iowa during the spring of 1993. The three target populations are students enrolled in adult special education, adult basic education, and English as a second language programs.

The findings are based on a sampling of 495 adult basic education participants from Iowa's 15 community colleges. Although representative, the sampling conducted was not statistically random. However, the results are consistent with other studies of the same populations conducted over the past several years. Both demographic information and test results should be interpreted with some degree of caution.

Section I Special Education Learners Learner Characteristics

Gender and Age

More than one-half (56%) the Special Education learners were female. With respect to age, learners were distributed throughout the age categories. Ninety-two percent were older than 26 years of age, and more than one third (35%) were 56 years of age or older.

Highest Grade

Learners were from diverse educational backgrounds. 52% received six or fewer years of education, while nearly one-third (30%) received twelve years of education.

Highest Degree

The majority (76%) had not received any diploma. Twelve percent had graduated from high school. Three percent had received a technical degree, and nine percent had received some other type of degree.

Native Language and Ethnic Background

All Special Education learners sampled were Caucasian. English was their native language.

Reading Test Results

Reading Score

Twelve percent scored between 135 and 160 on the reading test. At this level, learners can match pictures to symbols. Almost one-half (45%) scored between 161 and 180. These learners can match some words with symbols. Forty percent scored between 181 and 190 indicating that they can recognize certain words and phrases. Three percent scored between 191 and 200. These learners can read only very basic written materials. See Appendix A for additional information on test scores.

Table IA - Special Education
Learner Characteristics

	Valid Percent	N=40
GENDER		39
Male	44	17
Female	56	22
AGE		39
18-20	3	1
21-25	5	2
26-35	18	7
36-45	18	7
46-55	21	8
56+	35	14
HIGHEST GRADE		33
<6	52	17
7-8	12	4
9-11	6	2
12	30	10
HIGHEST DEGREE		33
None	76	25
High School	12	4
Technical	3	1
Other	9	7
NATIVE LANGUAGE		35
English	100	35
ETHNIC BACKGROUND		34
Caucasian	100	34

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Table IB - Special Education
Reading Test Results

	Valid Percent	N=40
READING SCORE		40
135-160	12	3
161-180	45	12
181-190	40	10
190-200	3	1

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Section II

English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners

Learner Characteristics

Gender and Age

More than one-half (61%) the ESL learners were female. The majority (57%) were younger than 36 years of age.

Years of Education

While more than one-third of the ESL participants (35%) had received fewer than six years of education, one half had received at least twelve years of education.

Highest Degree Earned

Forty-two percent indicated that they had not earned any degree. Twenty-seven percent had earned a high school diploma, and more than one-fourth (27%) had received a college or other type of degree.

Native Language

Most ESL learners (64%) spoke Vietnamese. Sixteen percent spoke Spanish. Eleven percent spoke Chinese, and the other six percent spoke Lao, Cambodian, Russian, Serbian, or Korean.

Ethnic Background

Among the ESL learners sampled, the majority (67%) were Indo-Chinese. Most of these learners were from Vietnam. Sixteen percent were Hispanic, twelve-percent were Asian, and three percent were Eastern European.

Table IIA- English as a Second Language (ESL) Learner Characteristics

	Valid Percent	N=64
GENDER		61
Male	39	24
Female	61	37
AGE		61
18-20	5	3
21-25	36	22
26-35	16	10
36-45	21	13
46-55	10	6
56+	12	7
HIGHEST GRADE		58
<6	35	20
9-11	15	9
12	24	14
13+	26	15
HIGHEST DEGREE		59
None	42	25
High School	27	16
A.A. Degree	4	2
College	20	12
Other	7	4
NATIVE LANGUAGE		64
Vietnamese	64	41
Spanish	16	10
Chinese	11	7
Other	9	6
ETHNIC BACKGROUND		64
Indo Chinese	67	43
Asian	12	8
Hispanic	16	10
E. European	5	3

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ESL Test Results

ESL Reading Scores

Thirteen percent of the ESL participants scored below 200. This group may have great difficulty with reading necessary to function effectively in everyday life. A larger portion (42%) scored between 200 and 214, indicating they are able to read very basic written materials. One-fourth (25%) scored between 215 and 224. These learners can typically read well enough to fulfill routine social obligations but cannot read at a high school or GED level. About ten-percent scored between 225 and 230. These learners are ready to enter a high school or GED program. Another ten percent scored 231 or higher. This group could succeed in a high school or GED program. See Appendix A for additional test score information.

ESL Listening Scores

Nearly one-third (29%) the ESL learners scored below 200 on their listening pre-test, indicating they have great difficulty understanding English spoken in everyday situations. The majority (55%) scored between 200 and 214, indicating they are able to understand basic conversations. Eleven percent scored between 215 and 224. These learners can typically understand English well enough to function effectively in everyday life but are not ready to enter a high school or GED program. Almost five percent scored at or above 225 and could succeed in a high school or GED program.

Reading Scores by Listening Scores

By comparing ESL participants' scores on the reading and listening tests, it was determined that more than one-third (37%) scored within the same range in both reading and listening. However, more than one-half (57%) scored higher in reading than in listening. See Appendix B for instructions on interpreting Table IIC.

Table IIB - ESL Learner Test Results

	Valid Percent	N=64
READING SCORE		60
<200	13	8
200-214	42	25
215-224	25	15
225-230	10	6
231+	10	6
LISTENING SCORE		63
<200	29	18
200-214	55	35
215-224	11	7
225-230	2	1
231+	3	2

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Table IIC - ESL Reading Score
by Listening Score

Listening Score

Count Row % Col % Total %	<200	200- 214	215- 224	225- 230	231+	N Row %
<200	6 75 37.5 10	2 25 5.9 3.3	-	-	-	8 13.3
200-214	10 40 62.5 16.7	14 56 41.2 23.3	1 4 14.3 1.7	-	-	25 41.7
215-224	-	14 93.3 41.2 23.3	1 6.7 14.3 1.7	-	-	15 25
225-230	-	4 66.7 11.8 6.7	1 16.7 14.3 1.7	-	1 16.7 50 1.7	6 10
231+	-	-	4 66.7 57.1 6.7	1 16.7 100 1.7	1 16.7 50 1.7	6 10
N Col %	16 26.7	34 56.7	7 11.7	1 1.7	2 3.3	60 100

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Section III

Adult Basic Education (ABE) Learners

Learner Characteristics

Gender and Age

More than one-half (59%) the ABE learners were female. Seventy-one percent of the population sampled was younger than 36 years of age.

Highest Grade

Only seven percent of the ABE learners had fewer than seven years of education. More than one-half (56%) had received some high school education (grades 9-11), while 17 percent had twelve or more years of education.

Highest Degree Earned

The majority (82%) had no high school diploma. Fourteen percent finished high school or received a GED certificate, and four percent received an Associate of Arts, technical or other degree. No ABE learners reported having earned a four-year college degree.

Native Language

Nearly all the ABE learners (96%) indicated that they spoke English. The remaining four percent spoke Spanish (1%), Vietnamese (1%), or other unspecified languages (2%).

Ethnic Background

Nearly three-fourths (74%) were Caucasian. Seventeen percent were Black, and the remaining nine percent were Hispanic (3%), Asian (3%), American Indian (1%) and Other (2%).

Table IIIA- Adult Basic Education (ABE) Learner Characteristics

	Valid Percent	N=391
GENDER		371
Male	41	153
Female	59	218
AGE		368
<18	11	39
18-20	16	61
21-25	16	59
26-35	28	102
36-45	15	54
46-55	9	32
56+	5	21
HIGHEST GRADE		377
<6	7	24
7-8	20	76
9-11	56	212
12	15	58
13+	2	7
HIGHEST DEGREE		350
None	82	311
G.E.D.	2	6
High School	12	46
A. A. / Tech. Degree	1	4
Other	3	11
NATIVE LANGUAGE		383
English	96	368
Spanish	1	4
Vietnamese	1	3
Other	2	8
ETHNIC BACKGROUND		380
Caucasian	74	280
Black	17	66
Hispanic	3	12
Asian	2	9
American Indian	1	5
Other	2	8

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ABE Test Results

ABE Reading Scores

Three percent of the ABE learners had reading scores below 200, indicating they they would have great difficulty with reading necessary to function effectively in everyday life. Nearly one-fifth (18%) scored in the 200-214 range on the pre-test. These learners would be able to read simple materials encountered in everyday life. Another 25 percent scored between 215 and 224, indicating they can read well enough to function effectively in everyday routine matters but are not ready for high school courses. Nine percent scored between 225 and 230. These learners are reading at a high school level. Almost one-half (45%) scored 231 or higher on the pre-test indicating they are reading at a high school level. See Appendix A for test score interpretation.

ABE Math Scores

Nearly one-fourth (24%) the ABE participants scored below 200 on the math pre-test, indicating they have few math skills and have difficulty with math in everyday situations. Thirty-four percent scored between 200 and 214. These learners can perform only basic mathematical calculations. Almost one-fourth (24%) scored between 215 and 224. This group can use enough math to function effectively in everyday situations but are not ready to learn high school mathematics skills. Eight percent scored between 225 and 230. This group has enough math preparation to enter a high school or GED program. Ten percent scored 231 or more, indicating they would succeed in a high school or GED level math course.

Reading Scores by Math Scores

Three-fourths (75%) the ABE learners' math skills were lower than their reading skills. For example, fifteen percent scored higher than 231 in reading (high school level) but scored below 214 in math, indicating they were beginners in math. See Appendix B for instructions on interpreting Table IIIC.

Table IIIB - ABE Learner Test Results

	Valid Percent	N=391
READING SCORE		390
<200	3	13
200-214	18	70
215-224	25	96
225-230	9	35
231+	45	176
MATH SCORE		383
<200	24	94
200-214	34	130
215-224	24	91
225-230	8	30
231+	10	38

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Table IIIC - ABE Reading Score by Math Score

Math Score						
Count Row % Col % Total %	<200	200-214	215-224	225-230	231+	N Row %
<200	10 90.9 10.6 2.6	1 9.1 .8 .3	-	-	-	11 2.9
200-214	48 68.6 51.1 12.5	17 24.3 13.1 4.4	4 5.7 4.4 1	1 1.5 3.3 .3	-	70 18.3
215-224	26 28 27.7 6.8	44 47.3 33.8 11.5	20 21.5 22 5.2	1 1.1 3.3 .3	2 2.2 5.3 .5	93 24.3
225-230	3 8.8 3.2 .8	18 52.9 13.8 4.7	6 17.6 6.6 1.6	2 5.9 6.7 .5	5 14.7 13.2 1.3	34 8.9
231+	7 4 7.4 1.8	50 28.6 38.5 13.1	61 34.9 67 15.9	26 14.9 86.7 6.8	31 17.7 81.6 8.1	175 45.7
N Col %	94 24.5	130 33.9	91 23.8	30 7.8	38 9.9	383 100

CASAS, 1993

Table IVA - Characteristics of All Program Participants

<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Special Ed. N = 40</i>	<i>ESL N= 64</i>	<i>ABE N = 391</i>	<i>Total N = 495</i>
GENDER				
Male	44%	39%	41%	41%
Female	56	61	59	59
AGE				
<18	0	0	11	8
18-20	3	5	16	15
21-25	5	36	16	18
26-35	18	16	28	26
36-45	18	21	15	16
46-55	21	10	9	11
56+	35	12	5	6
HIGHEST GRADE				
<6	52	35	7	13
7-8	12	0	20	17
9-11	6	15	56	47
12	30	24	15	18
13+	0	26	2	5
HIGHEST DEGREE				
None	76	42	82	77
G.E.D.	0	0	2	5
High School	12	27	12	11
A.A. /Technical	3	4	1	1
College	0	20	0	3
Other	9	7	3	3
NATIVE LANGUAGE				
English	100	0	96	84
Spanish	0	16	1	3
Vietnamese	0	64	1	9
Chinese	0	11	0	1
Other	0	9	2	3
ETHNIC BACKGROUND				
Caucasian	100	0	74	67
Black	0	0	17	14
Hispanic	0	16	3	5
Asian	0	12	2	10
American Indian	0	0	1	1
Indo-Chinese	0	67	0	1
Other	0	5	2	2

CASAS, 1993

Summary and Recommendations

This report provides baseline information about three target adult populations enrolled in adult basic education programs in Iowa during the spring of 1993. The major findings indicated the following:

- Overall, the population served was balanced regarding gender.
- Sixty-five percent were below 36 years of age.
- The majority (80%) were enrolled in Adult Basic Education programs.
- More than three-fourths (77%) had fewer than 12 years education.
- Those with more than 12 years education or with college diplomas were enrolled almost exclusively in ESL programs.
- Twelve percent had fewer than seven years education.
- Most of the learners sampled (84%) spoke English.
- The remaining 16 percent spoke Vietnamese (9%), Spanish (3%), Chinese (1%), or other languages (3%).
- Most (67%) were Caucasian. The remainder were Black (14%), Hispanic (5%), Asian or Indo-Chinese (11%), or American Indian (1%).

Special Education

- Forty-three percent can recognize certain words and phrases. Of this group, three percent can read basic written materials.

English as a Second Language

- ESL programs are serving three main ethnic groups: Indo-Chinese mostly from Vietnam, Asians, and Hispanics.
- Most of the ESL learners scored within CASAS levels A and B in listening and within levels B and C in reading.
- Despite their educational backgrounds, these learners require instruction in reading and listening to function more effectively in the community.

Adult Basic Education

- Nearly one-half the ABE learners are able to read at a high school entry level.
- Overall math scores for ABE learners are significantly lower than reading scores.
- These learners need basic instruction in math before being able to complete a high school or GED certificate program.

This initial report provides baseline information that helps with planning programs to meet learner needs, as well as with identifying appropriate curriculum, establishing learning continuums, and conducting program evaluation. It will also provide a basis of comparison with the Iowa State Adult Literacy Survey (IASALS) that identifies the literacy levels of the general population in this state.

Appendix A **Test score interpretation**

CASAS Scores	CASAS Level	Description
<180	5A-3A	At a score of 134 and below (5A), learners recognize oral or written names of some actual or pictured objects such as body parts, clothing and furniture. They can discriminate between big and little, boy and girl, woman and man, and up to three objects. At a score from 135 to 160 (4A), adults can master some health practices, grooming skills, clothing selection and the vocabulary for familiar places and tasks. From 161-179 (3A), adults can master work tasks and behaviors, transportation, the safe use of some tools, and peer relationships. They may be able to recognize or print their name, address and phone number. ESL students at this level are considered to be at an orientation level and are barely functioning, if at all, in English. They may not be literate in their own language and may need to learn to read and write the alphabet and numbers. They are learning how to pronounce English sounds and simple words.
180-199	2A-A	Adults scoring between 180 and 199 can function in a limited way in situations related to immediate needs. They can read simplified signs and interpret forms that include name, address, telephone number and dates. They are able to follow simple oral, but not written directions. These adults can handle routine, entry-level jobs but are limited to jobs in which all tasks can be demonstrated and only the most basic oral communication is required.
200-214	B	At this level adults can satisfy basic survival needs and some limited social demands. They can function in entry-level jobs that require simple oral communication skills and where performance tasks are demonstrated. They are able to provide basic written information, read simple materials including signs, notices and want ads, answer basic questions about their background, follow simple directions and communicate regarding problems encountered in completing a job task.
215-224	C	At this level adults can satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. They can use the telephone to inquire about available jobs. They are able to perform basic literacy tasks and computational skills in an employment setting such as reading simple work memos or interpreting wage information but may have difficulty following complex sets of directions.
225-230	D	At this level adults can generally perform at a high school entry level in reading or math. They can profit from instruction in a GED preparation program and would be ready to pass the GED in a short time. They can usually perform work that involves following oral and written directions in familiar and some unfamiliar situations. They are able to write memos and when applying for jobs, cover letters. They can also read technical information such as safety regulations and operating instructions for tools and equipment.
231+	D	At this level adults can succeed in a high school or GED program. They are able to read and interpret non-simplified texts, and are able to compute using some higher level mathematics. They are generally able to communicate their ideas effectively orally or in writing.

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Appendix B

Interpreting Tables IIC and IIIC

The crosstabulations in Tables IIC and IIIC provide information on the joint distribution of cases across two variables (for example, reading and listening scores.) The categories for each variable are displayed along the first column and first row of the chart. The cell in the upper left hand corner contains the key to the information presented in each cell.

Each cell of a crosstabulation comprises four numbers, as long as data meeting column and row criteria are present. The top number in a cell represents the number of cases which meet the two specified criteria of that cell. For example, in Table IIC, (page 3 of this report), the number of cases (learners) who scored below 200 on the reading test and below 200 on the listening test was six.

The second number found in each cell is the row percentage (Row %). The base number used for calculating the percentage is the total number of cases meeting the horizontal criteria of the cell, in this case 8, which represents the number of reading scores below 200. Therefore, 75 percent of all reading test scores below 200 also have a listening test score below 200. Row percentages will sum to 100 when added horizontally.

The third number in each cell is the column percentage (Col %). It is computed using the column or vertical criteria of the cell as its base. The percentage of all learners scoring below 200 on the listening test when paired with reading scores below 200 is 37.5. Column percentages will sum to 100 when added vertically.

The last number in each cell is the total percent. This number represents the percentage of total cases in the crosstabulation formed by the column and row criteria of the cell. In Table IIC (on page 3 of the report) 60 cases were found that reported both listening and reading scores and comprise the total number of cases used for the crosstabulation. (See bottom right hand corner.) Referring to the cell that includes scores below 200 on reading and listening, the cell percentage is ten. This cell represents 10 percent of the data in the sample ($6/60 = 10\%$).